

## PEDAGOGICAL INPUT

# *for the adventure of family life*



### 73\_ **What is normal?**

## **Why evaluation and comparisons make you unhappy**

Parents want only the best for their child. They want it to belong and keep up with the community. Comparisons with other children creep in early on, what the child can already do, whether it can already walk, eat or talk alone, whether it is diaper-free, how many friends it has, how it behaves, etc., all in all, how it acts and what performance it provides. Although a lot depends not only on the child's age, but also on its individuality, character, being, personality or preferences, these comparisons expose children to social evaluations and classifications at an early age. Depending on the evaluations experienced, this shapes the child's self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence.

"Adults have the power to 'define' children as good or bad, hysterical or cute. But the more you define a person, the less space you give him or her to figure out who he or she is. How are children supposed to find out who they are when they are constantly being judged unfairly? This power of adults to define everything is basically poison for the children. Nothing worse can happen to them when it comes to developing their self-esteem." (Juul, 2005, p.98)<sup>1</sup>

How much room for personal development is left when the focus is primarily on a person's behaviour and not his or her personality? How does it feel for us adults when we are compared to others? Do we really become more confident by comparing ourselves to others? Or does this distort our self-image and inhibit our self-confidence?

"I'm not saying parents should never judge children's behaviour, but perhaps they should distinguish between 'how a child behaves' and 'who the child is'" (Juil, 2005, p.99)<sup>2</sup>

If we want to convey to our children they are lovable just the way they are, are allowed to feel valuable regardless of their achievements, then we can also behave towards them in the same way, especially when they make a mistake, have to face setbacks or something doesn't work. To the question: "what is normal?" the answer might be: "it's normal when you're allowed to be who you are and are loved for it regardless of your performance."

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**Recommended literature:** <sup>1/2</sup> Jesper Juul, (2005), Aus Erziehung wird Beziehung. Authentische Eltern – kompetente Kinder (Parenting Becomes a Relationship. Authentic parents - Competent Children), Verlag Herder, 2nd edition, Freiburg in Breisgau